

Submitter: Jeff Myers
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB2646

Good day Representatives of the Education Committee. I urge you to put a quick end to this bill.

I know there's at least one teacher in the committee, and very likely you all know some teachers. I've talked with many teachers in my kids' district and around the state over the past couple of years. They are tired. They are overwhelmed. They have been hit, kicked, bit, shoved, yelled at, cussed at, and more... and that's just the K-2nd grade teachers! Teachers already have a lot on their plates, especially with the learning loss associated with the remote learning we are still recovering from.

Rather than focus on academic supports though, we see bills like this that push teachers further away from academics and into quasi-mental health providers. This is yet another bill that aims to solve a problem with the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I'll give you an example. My school district implemented restorative practices (aka restorative justice) over 9 years ago as a way to eliminate the disparities in suspensions and expulsions between student groups. In other words, they felt this approach would make it so that they didn't suspend Black kids at 2.5x the rate of White kids. After 9 years of pushing this experiment, which did include several rounds of training, it has been a complete failure. Oddly enough, Black kids are now suspended at 2.7x the rate of White kids. The disparity INCREASED. Why is that? Well this approach is a lot more complex than they are willing to admit, and it requires a heck of a lot more rigor in the process and of course a lot more staff. So what are they doing now? They are doubling down on the approach and conducting more staff training and adding 4 coaches for a district with ~2000 teachers. It. Won't. Work.

The point is the lofty goals of this bill will never be achieved as written. Teachers need to be allowed to focus on academics. If we have children who are experiencing trouble or are dysregulated in any way, trust me, the teachers don't need more mental health training to know. They just need support from their administration to get this student to someone who can help (starting with their parents or caregivers!)

I'm sure those presenting these bills are truly trying to help children, but I urge you to draw a clear line when it comes to schools and stick with it. Oregon's academic results have declined year over year, directly in line with the steady decrease in teachers as a % of total staff. The further we push schools from academics, the worse things get for our students. Please kick bills like this out of the realm of

education and squarely with the right committees and departments where they should be.

Thank you for your time and support.

Jeff Myers